



American Citizen Services News

Don't Wait for an Evacuation

The U.S. is currently [advising](#) its citizens in Syria to “depart immediately while commercial transportation is readily available.” We appreciate that many of our citizens have already left.

By leaving now, you are able to

- leave on a flight of your choice,
- take the luggage you wish, and
- avoid desperate crowds.

But, the environment changes every day. Some airlines have already begun cancelling or reducing their flight schedule. On some days there are more obstacles to road travel and land border crossings than others.



Some Americans who are still here are waiting for their children to finish school before leaving. Please, monitor the rapidly changing situation closely. Others, however, have said that they plan to wait for an evacuation.

We have one thing to say — **Don't!**

Don't wait for an evacuation!

An evacuation occurs when there is no other way to leave a place where there is imminent, life-threatening danger. Crowds of people will be desperately seeking to get out. Evacuees can only take one small piece of luggage, and cannot take pets. In an evacuation, we generally do not take people all the way

to the United States. Instead, we take people to the nearest safe place — often a nearby country. And it's not free. Before traveling, an evacuee must sign a promissory note agree to pay the full commercial fare to the evacuation destination.

If you want to leave Syria now but are waiting for an evacuation because you are destitute and need financial assistance to return to the U.S., contact us. We can assist you in contacting family or friends to help pay for your return to the U.S. And in extreme cases, we can provide a loan to cover the cost of a one-way flight to the U.S.

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What Happens in an Evacuation (continued from page 1)

To help better understand how we can help during a crisis, here are some answers to frequently asked questions:

What can the U.S. government do to help citizens in countries facing civil strife or natural disaster?

In the event of civil strife, natural disaster, or other occurrence endangering American citizens abroad, the U.S. Department of State issues Travel Alerts or Travel Warnings alerting Americans to credible, specific potential threats and providing relevant information. As a crisis develops, the U.S. embassy in the country concerned will contact local wardens, volunteers who have been organized to pass information from the Embassy to Americans working with or living near them. As a situation becomes more serious, the Embassy may recommend Americans to leave, and may assist Americans to arrange commercial transportation out of the country. If commercial transportation is unavailable, the Embassy may organize charter flights to transport Americans out of country, or request aircraft and other assistance from the U.S. military to evacuate Americans.

How can I ensure that I receive information from the Embassy?

The most important thing you can do is enroll with the Embassy, if you have not already done so. Once enrolled you will be assigned to a warden in your area or organization who will pass information from the Embassy. If you provide an e-mail address, you will also receive messages directly. You can enroll by creating a secure account on the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) website that will allow you to inform the State Department about all of your travel: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/> Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts are also posted on the State Department website: <http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/warnings.html>.

Who will pay to evacuate me and my family?

If commercial carriers are operating, the Embassy will recommend that you depart on your own and at your own expense. If you don't have money to pay the fare, the Embassy can help you contact family and friends and assist in transferring money from them. In extreme circumstances, a destitute American wishing to return to the U.S. may qualify for a repatriation loan. The conditions for making such loans are stringent, and your passport will be limited until you repay the loan.

If commercial carriers are not operating, and the U.S. government charters aircraft or requests military assistance, you will be required to sign a promissory note

guaranteeing repayment. The government is required by law to seek repayment of expenses for the evacuation of Americans from overseas locations. The amount charged is generally the cost of a full-fare economy ticket. If the actual cost per evacuee is less, you will be charged this lesser amount. The Embassy will not require, and will not be able to take, cash or credit at the time of evacuation. You will be billed later and your passport will not be limited.

Where will I be evacuated to?

In most cases, the U.S. government will bring Americans to the nearest safe location, which is generally not the United States. Evacuees will be helped by Embassy staff at that location in making arrangements for onward transportation, if that is desired.

My child is an American citizen but I am not. Can you evacuate me and the rest of my family?

If a child does not have an American parent or guardian in-country, the U.S. government will allow one adult to travel with the child on an evacuation flight. If there is more than one American child in the same family, only one adult escort will be permitted. Non-American siblings will not be provided evacuation assistance. Non-American escorts are not guaranteed entry into the United States. They will need to apply for and qualify for an appropriate visa. The non-American escort must also be documentarily qualified to enter the country designated as the safe location.

Besides transportation, what other assistance is available from the U.S. government for evacuees?

The U.S. government is not able to provide money for food, lodging or other purposes to evacuees. Once evacuees have arrived in a safe location, they are expected to provide for themselves. U.S. Embassy employees will be available to assist in finding hotels and onward transportation. They may also be able to assist in contacting family and friends and in transferring funds.

What will I be allowed to bring on the evacuation flight?

Each evacuee will be allowed to bring one suitcase, weighing less than 10 kilos (22 pounds), and one carry on item. Pets will not be allowed on evacuation flights.

Online resources for Americans who wish to be prepared in case of an evacuation:

"Evacuation Plan – Don't Leave

Home Without It" (U.S. Department of State):

<http://www.state.gov/www/flo/paper10.html>

"Your Evacuation Plan" (American Red Cross):

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/evacuation.html>

"Preparing an Evacuation Plan"

(U.S. Department of Homeland Security):

<http://www.nationalterroralert.com/readyguide/evacuationplan.htm>

We've Been Calling

All of our enrolled citizens (which includes all of the recipients of this newsletter) should have received a telephone call from the U.S. Embassy over the past couple weeks. We have been calling all of the more than 5000 citizens who are enrolled with us to confirm that their contact information is correct.

During an emergency situation, it is important that we have accurate contact information to be able to assist.

During the past month, we have begun sending an SMS message whenever we send out a new Warden Message, in order to alert you to it.

Some of you will be receiving this newsletter for the first time because we now have an e-mail address for you.

If you have not heard from us, it may mean that our contact information is incorrect. If you have enrolled with us via the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, you can update your own record. Otherwise, you can e-mail us at acsdamascus@state.gov to update your record.

Priority One: U.S. citizens

During the current turmoil in Syria, in addition to the urgent situations where an Americans are missing or arrested, many more Americans are applying for passports. During the five weeks ending on May 5, we issued nearly three times as many passports to U.S. citizens than during the five weeks ending March 31. We are committed to making sure that any U.S. citizen needing a passport can make an appointment within two or three days.

As a reminder, adults who are renewing their passports don't need to come to the Embassy to submit their application. They can submit the application via the DHL courier service. All you need to do is send your old passport, together with a completed DS-82 form and a return air waybill via DHL to the Embassy. DHL will also collect the passport application fee. In about two weeks, we will return both your old passport and the new passport back to you via DHL.

Priority Two: Immigration

Some Americans have told us that they can't consider returning to the United States because their husbands or wives or children or parents are Syrians and don't have visas.

Many have been surprised when we have explained how easy the immigration process is. If you are a U.S. citizen, you can file a petition for your husband, wife, children or parents (if you yourself are over 21 years old) right at the Embassy. Once you have filed a petition, we will schedule a date for your family member to submit the immigrant visa application about two weeks later. If you are prepared with all of the required documents (birth certificates, marriage certificates, etc.), the entire immigration process could be complete within a month.

We have seen a huge increase in the number of Americans who are filing petitions for their family members to immigrate, and we are committed to acting on these applications promptly.

Nonimmigrant Visas

In order to ensure that we can give priority to U.S. citizens and to immigration, we have had to reduce the number of appointments available for nonimmigrant visas. Prospective visa applicants will have noticed that they must now wait several weeks before the next available visa appointments. We recognize that there are some cases where the nonimmigrant visa is urgent. These cases could include:

- A family member of a U.S. citizen who wishes to leave Syria together with the U.S. citizen, but does not wish to immigrate at this time
- A student or exchange visitor who needs to get a visa to arrive in time to begin studies
- Someone who needs to travel to the U.S. for urgent medical treatment

If, during this period when there is a significant backlog in nonimmigrant visa appointments, a person in one of these three prioritized categories wishes to make an appointment earlier than the dates available online, he or she may request an earlier appointment by email at nivdamascus@state.gov.

My Passport and What it Means



Your U.S. passport—perhaps you use it all the time for travel, or perhaps you have other nationalities and other travel documents. Many U.S. citizens have more than one citizenship and therefore may have multiple passports. We wanted to share some important information about how the travel document you use to enter a country can affect you.

By presenting your U.S. passport when you enter a country, you are asking to be admitted into that country as a U.S. citizen. In most cases, if a country admits you as a U.S. citizen, it also recognizes its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations to notify the U.S. Consul if you are arrested, and to permit a U.S. Consul to visit you to see that you are being treated properly.

One of America's highest priorities is the safety and welfare of its citizens. No matter where you were born, how long you have been a citizen, or what travel document you may have used to enter another country, all U.S. citizens are equal. However, if you have more than one citizenship and have chosen to enter a country

by using the passport of the another country, the country which has admitted you may see you not as a citizen of the U.S., but as a citizen of the other country. It may choose not to inform us if you are arrested or have other difficulties.

Sometime a country may consider you to be one of its citizens and you may not even be aware of it. Syria, for example, considers Americans of Syrian origin to be Syrian and does not require them to obtain a visa to visit, even when traveling on a U.S. passport. Additional information about dual nationality can be found online at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1753.html

No matter what passport you use, if you are a U.S. citizen please let the U.S. embassy or consulate there know you are there. Enroll yourself and any U.S. citizens in your family or traveling group:

<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>

Leaving Syria with Children

In some recent instances, American citizen children have been returning to the U.S. unaccompanied, or accompanied only by the mother. Families should be aware that a child under the age of eighteen whose father is Syrian or of Syrian descent must have his/her father's permission to leave Syria, even if the parents are separated or divorced and the mother has been granted full custody by a Syrian court.

Tips from the CDC: Coping with Stress

Sometimes after experiencing a traumatic event that is especially frightening—including personal or environmental disasters, or being threatened with an assault—people have a strong and lingering reaction to stress. Getting the right care and support can put problems in perspective and help stressful feelings and symptoms subside.

Stress is an inevitable part of life that everyone - adults, teens, and even children - experiences at times. Stress can be beneficial by helping people develop the skills they need to cope with and adapt to new and potentially threatening situations throughout life. However, the beneficial aspects of stress diminish when it is severe enough to overwhelm a person's ability to cope effectively.

When the symptoms of stress are intense or last too long, it can cause people to feel overwhelmed and have an effect on their ability to cope.

Strong emotions, jitters, and sadness or depression may all be part of this normal and temporary reaction to the stress of an overwhelming event. Common reactions to a stressful event can include:

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Difficulty making decisions
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Loss of appetite
- Nightmares and reoccurring thoughts about the event
- Anger
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Crying
- Sleep difficulties
- Headaches, back pains, and stomach problems
- Difficulty concentrating



Feeling emotional and nervous or having trouble sleeping and eating can all be normal reactions to stress. Getting the right care and support can put problems in perspective and help stressful feelings and symptoms subside in a few days or weeks.

Here are some tips for getting the right care and support in difficult times.

- **Stay in touch with family.** Stay around people who are caring and positive.
- **Stay active.** Go for a walk or run.
- **Get involved.** Get involved in activities to support your community.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Drugs and alcohol may seem to help with the stress temporarily; in the long run they create additional problems that compound the stress you are already feeling.
- **Find support.** Ask for help from a parent, friend, counselor, doctor, or other person you trust. Talk with them about the stress you feel and problems you face.
- **Take care of yourself.** Get plenty of rest and exercise and eat properly.
- **Take a time-out.** If you feel stressed, give yourself a break. Allow some down time, even if it is only a 30-second time-out.

American Language Center Test Dates

Test	May 2011	June 2011
ITP	Wednesday, May 4 Monday, May 23	Wednesday, June 8 Thursday, June 30
GRE	N/A	N/A
SAT	Saturday, May 7	Saturday, June 4
TOEFL	Saturday, May 7	N/A
TSE	No longer offered	No longer offered
TOEIC	Tuesday, May 24	Wednesday, June 29

Reprint: Basic Emergency Supply Kit

In an emergency, local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone immediately. You could get help in hours, or it might take days. In addition, basic services such as electricity, gas, water, sewage treatment, and telephones may be cut off for days, or even a week or longer.

Recommended Items to Include in a Basic Emergency Supply Kit:

- Water, one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert and extra batteries for both
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask, to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Can opener for food (if kit contains canned food)
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers, inverter or solar charger



American Citizen Services Hours and Contact Information

For appointments, please go to our website at :
<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/service.html>

**U.S. Embassy Damascus
American Citizen Services**

**Consular Section
2, Al-Mansour Street, Abu Roumaneh
PO Box 29**

**Damascus, Syria
Phone: (+963-11) 3391-4444
Fax: (+963-11) 3391-3999)**

UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

*The Embassy will be closed for Memorial Day
on Sunday, May 29, 2011.*

BREATHES there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said, 'This is my
own, my native land!' Whose heart hath ne'er
within him burn'd As home his footsteps he hath
turn'd From wandering on a foreign strand?

- Sir Walter Scott